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Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics

U. S. Department of Agriculture
and State Agricultural Colleges
Cooperating

Extension Service, Office of
Cooperative Extension Work,
Washington, D. C.

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REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON AN EXTENSION
OUTLOOK PROGRAM FOR THE SOUTHERN STATES



Introduction

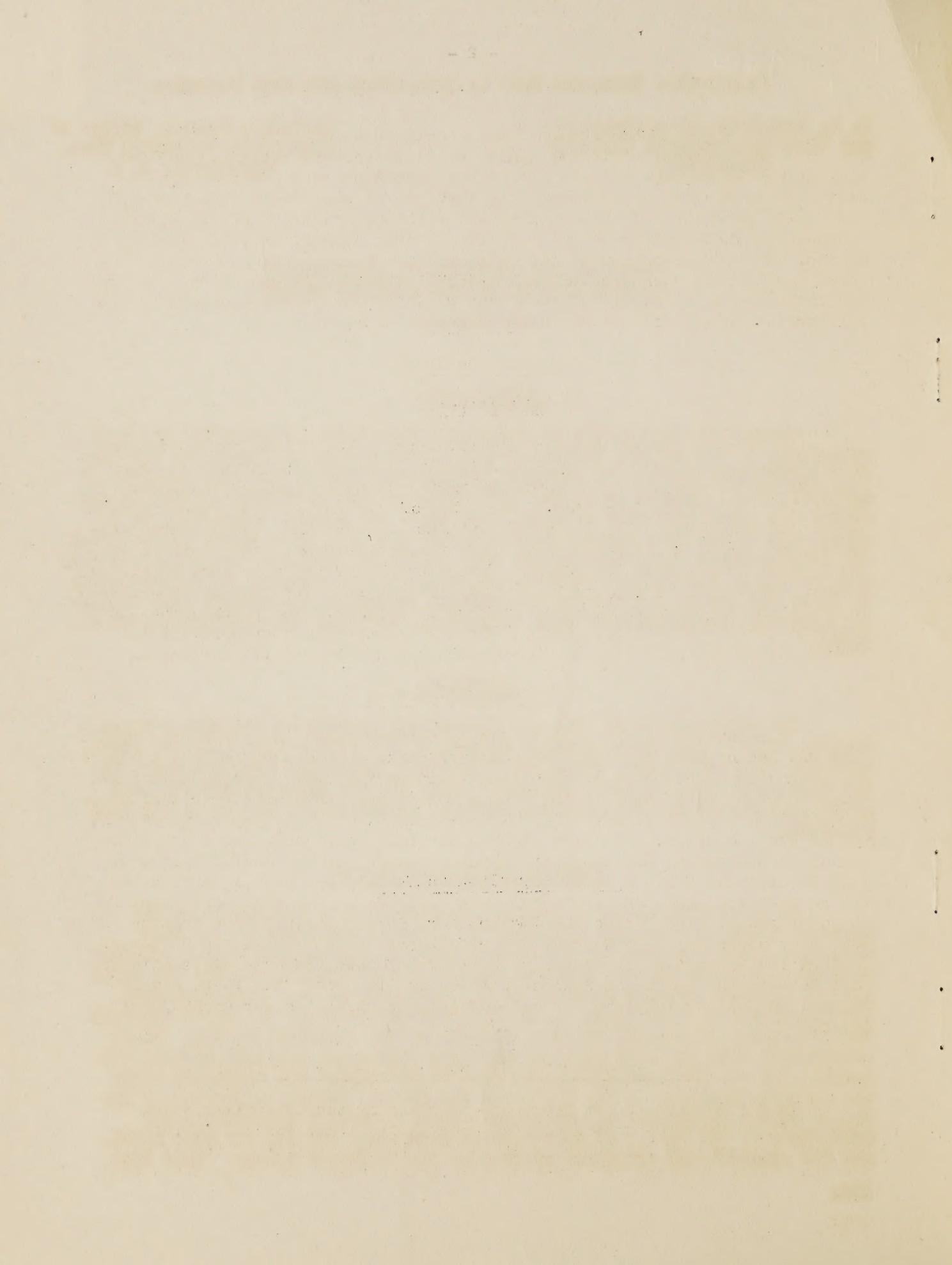
Through the employment of additional economists in marketing and farm management by the Federal Government and by the different States and the further development and use of economic information dealing with the problems of agriculture and general business, this phase of work by extension workers and others has taken on a much enlarged importance and scope. Therefore, it is timely and proper that special consideration and thought be given to the plans and methods which extension workers will follow in utilizing available economic information to the fullest possible advantage and in carrying this information to those engaged in agriculture and related industries and aiding them in making practical application of this information to their own problems and conditions.

Objective

The committee feels that the fundamental purpose of research and extension outlook work is to provide farmers at the proper time with the best possible information upon which the individual farmer may plan and carry on his farm operations in a way that will bring him the greatest possible net return and afford him the greatest possible stability and safety in his farm business.

Regional Outlook Conference

In order that economic information particularly applicable to the Southern States may be made available to farmers in advance of the time when farm plans are made for the coming year, it recommended that a regional outlook conference for the Southern States be held annually during the early part of November at such location as may from year to year seem best from the standpoint of conditions in the different sections of the South and from the standpoint of accessibility to workers in the different States. It is recommended that the conference be known as the annual regional outlook conference for the Southern States and that it be planned and conducted under the general direction of the Office of Cooperative Extension Service of the United States Department of Agriculture with the active cooperation and assistance of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, the Federal Farm Board, and the research and extension workers of the different States. This com-



mittee feels that the success of future conferences will be in a large measure in direct proportion to the number of State workers attending and participating. Since the success of outlook extension work depends upon the active participation of all extension workers, we especially recommend that each State director of extension consider the desirability of liberal attendance at these conferences by administrators, specialists, and county agents. We wish also to urge the importance of an increasing emphasis in these conferences upon problems and methods of economics extension. We urge the inclusion of discussions and demonstrations of effective methods in the interpretation and dissemination of economic information.

State Outlook

The interpretation and application of national or regional outlook information and economic data in the different States must necessarily be made with special reference to conditions in the respective States, taking into account conditions and situations in the States which may differ from general conditions used as a basis for the national or regional outlook. This will necessarily involve the accumulation and analysis of economic data of special application to the respective States. For this purpose the preparation of annual State outlook reports by economists and other workers in the different States is important. Research and extension workers should prepare State outlook reports cooperatively and, in order that all possible information and experience may be brought into play in the preparation and application of outlook information, extension subject-matter specialists should have a definite part in the preparation of State outlook reports.

Training of Workers

On account of the fact that many workers engaged in extension service have not had opportunity for systematic training in the preparation, analysis, and extension of economic information, it is particularly important that some definite plan be followed in the States for giving these workers specific opportunities for self improvement in economics, through correspondence study, summer short courses, sabbatical leave, special group conferences and individual consultation, and in observations and study of successful pieces of work in other States. Careful consideration should be given such plans by the respective States and such procedure followed as may seem best adapted to conditions in the respective States, each State utilizing the service and advice of workers in the Bureau of Agricultural Economics and the Office of Cooperative Extension Service. It is important that there be systematic contact between the different States in this work in order that there may be general uniformity in plans and methods and opportunities for exchange of ideas.

Basing Programs of Work Upon Economic Information

In the preparation of programs and plans by subject-matter specialists in the respective States, it is important that careful consideration be given to economic facts having to do with the specialist's line of work and that these programs be backed up by economic data. To bring this about,

it is necessary that there be careful coordination and cooperation between economists and other subject-matter specialists in extension and between different subject-matter specialists. For instance, a specialist in soil and crops can not intelligently outline a program in feed crops and pastures for the State without regard to the economic situation for different classes of livestock and vice versa.

More and more, the assembling, analysis, and interpretation of economic information must be used as a basis for county and community extension programs and plans. Because of special local conditions or situations, the national, regional, or State outlook may not apply to particular counties or communities and for that reason it is essential that a systematic plan be followed in assembling additional data of special application to the local situation. The assembling, analysis, and interpretation of data as a basis for county and community extension programs must be done on such a basis and by such methods as will insure the dependability and practicability of the data assembled and the conclusions drawn. For that reason, it is important that this plan be developed gradually and cautiously and only as the training and experience of extension workers in the interpretation and use of economic information seem to justify.

Special Commodity Meetings

In addition to meetings for discussing the general agricultural outlook and planning programs of work, based upon general economic information, in which a general agricultural program will be outlined, there is need for a second type of economic meetings to deal with specific commodities. Under this class will come cotton-facts meetings, wheat-facts meetings, potato-facts meetings, etc. Such meetings have been held in a number of States and have served a very definite purpose, such meetings being held at times when farmers are naturally giving consideration to the planning of their farm operations and are in need of organized economic information concerning the commodities which they will produce. It is of special importance that outlook information presented at meetings of this type be closely tied up with local farm management and production facts and the work of other extension specialists.

Means of Disseminating Economic Information

Various means are being used by workers in different States in the dissemination of economic information, including newspaper publicity, monthly publications, circular letters to agents and farmers, the radio and other means. It is very essential that all of these be used to the fullest possible extent, but it is particularly important that they be timed properly in relation to activities in the field and that those who carry on these activities have a definite contact with conditions out in the various counties and communities and be thoroughly familiar with the work being carried on by the various supervisors and specialists and by county agents.

News Releases

There are three classes of publicity material which might be used in connection with the dissemination of economic information. First, the regular short news articles relative to prices, economic trends, cost of production, quality of product, etc., which will be used by country editors regularly from week to week and which will carry ideas and suggestions to farmers. Second, there are the periodical feature stories dealing with special phases of economic facts and which will require more space and more time and thought by the reader. Third, there is the special systematic advance and follow-up publicity to accompany a series of economic-facts meetings at a particular season and dealing with a particular situation or problem of a State or district. All have much value, but must be directed and timed with special reference to conditions in the State and work being carried on in the field.

Monthly Current Economic Publications

In some States regular monthly extension publications are prepared dealing with economic questions of importance and interest to farmers at the particular time. It seems that there is definite value in such a plan. In the first place, it requires the economics staff to check up on the situation regularly from month to month and keep themselves and their associates well up to date at all times. Second, it provides a means of giving to the farmer timely information from month to month and takes care of periodical fluctuations and situations which can not be covered in the annual State outlook. It also provides a means of releasing to farmers and others partial results of economic research as these results become available without waiting until complete results are available for publication. Third, it brings economic information to the attention of farmers and extension workers throughout the year rather than concentrating it in a short period of special activity at a certain time each year, and helps to establish in the mind of the farmer the habit of thinking and planning throughout the year on a basis of economic facts.

The Radio

Several States have been making effective use of the radio as a means of disseminating economic information and it is evident that this means can be used to a distinct advantage. In addition to market information, prices and other detailed timely data, a great deal of helpful economic information and many suggestions can be broadcast that will aid farmers in planning their farm operations and adjusting their plans to changes in the economic situation.

Special Outlines and Statements for Extension Workers

County agents, subject-matter specialists and other extension workers frequently lack the necessary time to sit down and analyze a large amount of technical economic material. They, therefore, need brief, condensed, and practical statements or outlines of such economic material, and extension

economists can render a distinct service to these workers by preparing such material at regular intervals throughout the year for use by county agents and other extension workers. This might take the form of a brief, practical statement of the dairy situation which a subject-matter specialist or county agent can use in a discussion of the question with a group of dairymen. Similar statements and outlines of facts might be prepared on a general variety of questions and such service would not only aid the subject-matter specialists and county agents in bringing the information to their people along with information on other phases of work, but will help these workers to acquire the habit of thinking along economic lines.

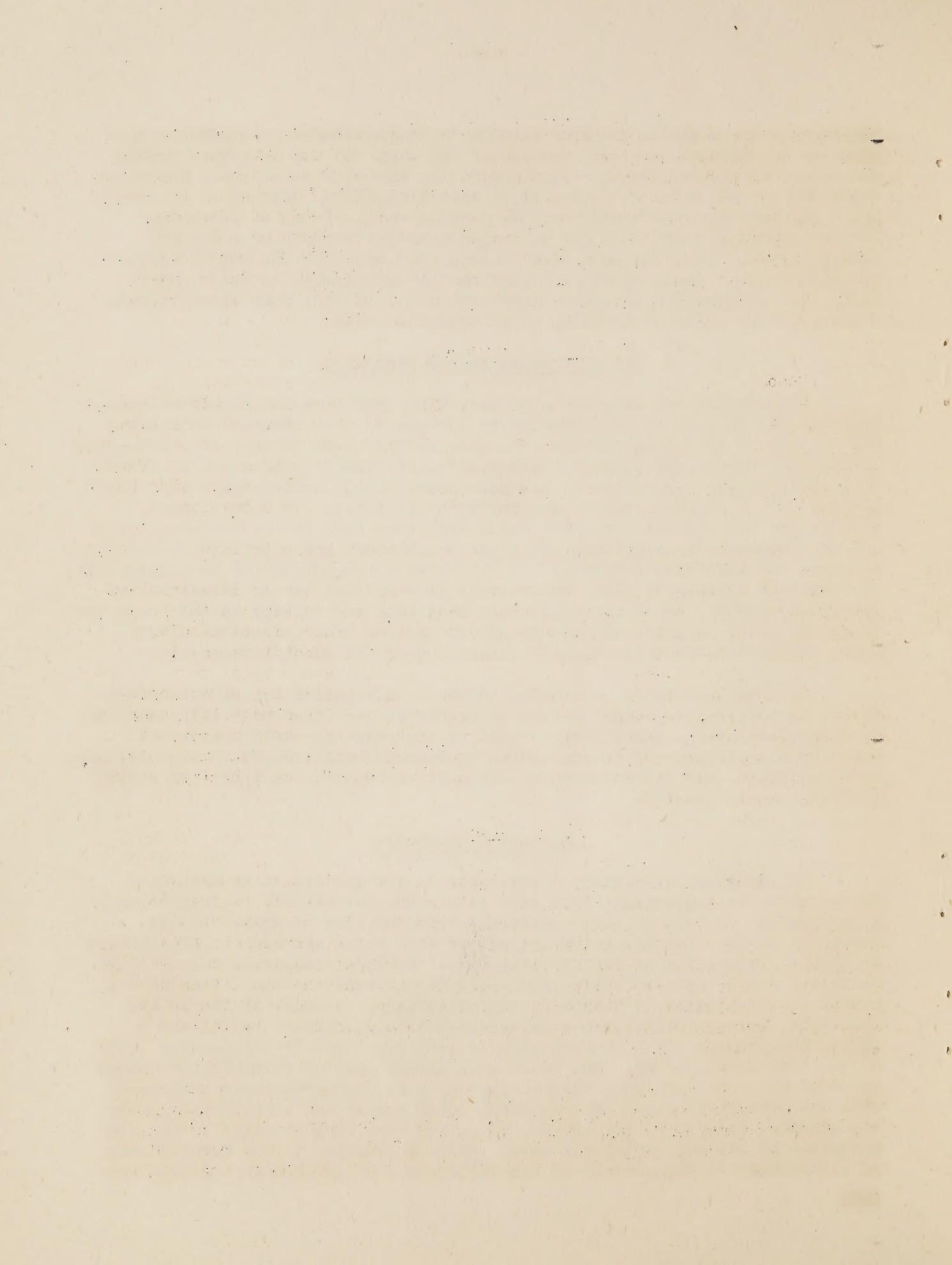
Economic Research and Extension

Recognizing the dependence of extension work upon the results of sound research and in view of the comparative newness of this phase of extension, and in view of the greatly increased scope of this work to meet the increasing demands of farmers for economic information, we wish to emphasize the importance of increasing the scope of economic research and making research results available to extension workers as rapidly as possible. We commend research workers for the splendid progress which they have made in the economic field and we recognize the importance of close correlation and coordination between research and extension programs. We also wish to emphasize the responsibility of extension workers to make the greatest possible use of the results of research, as rapidly as these results are available and to keep research workers in contact with economic conditions and to call to their attention the economic problems of farmers on which there is need for further research.

An important factor in making economic information available to farmers is the ability of county agents to understand and interpret this material in a practical way. Therefore, we wish to emphasize the need for careful training and guidance of county agents by economic specialists in the analysis, interpretation, and presentation of economic information on their own responsibility and initiative.

Acreage Adjustments

The question of acreage adjustments or acreage reduction movements is one which it seems might more effectively and more wisely be handled as a systematic, year-round, basic movement with the idea of stability and soundness in our farming operations rather than being carried on periodically as special intensified emergency campaigns. Acreage readjustment or acreage reduction should have something more definite as a basis than a straightforward appeal to all farmers to uniformly reduce acreage. It must be recognized that total acreage reduction is the accumulation of acreage reductions by individual farmers and that basically we must come down to the point of view of the individual farmer. The individual farmer must of necessity determine how much and what kind of a certain commodity he will produce in accordance with the production costs, acre yields, labor supply and utilization, quality demands, promise of net profit, etc., as these factors apply to his own situation on his own individual farm. He is interested in the relationship of his actions to the welfare of his fellows and of farmers as a group, but



primarily and above all he is interested in what commodities, what kind and quality of commodities and what methods of operation promise him the greatest net return upon his own farm. For instance, if in the light of information which a farmer has, a particular kind of cotton promises him greater net returns than other kinds or varieties, it must be accepted as sound business from his individual viewpoint for him to grow that which promises him the greatest return. It may also be that one farmer already is following a balanced system of farming, or it may be that he is growing cotton on land on which he is practically assured high yields and high quality at low cost and certainly it can not logically be contended that he should reduce his acreage on the same basis as the man who is producing low yields at high cost and of low quality. It would seem that the sound and practicable basis upon which to carry on acreage adjustment activities is to systematically throughout the year keep before the farmers the importance of low production costs, good yields, high quality of products, economy in utilization of labor and capital and balance in the farm business. From these the farmer can determine how to make adjustments in accordance with the situation which exists on his own farm and under his own circumstances, in the light of the best information which he has available bearing upon his particular situation.

Visualization Material Based Upon Localized Economic Data

We wish to emphasize the great value of visualization or illustrative material for use by county agents, specialists, and supervisors in the presentation of problems and plans to groups of farmers. There is particular interest among farmers in information based upon local conditions and local results. With this in mind, we emphasize the valuable and helpful service which economists and others can render in the local application of economic information by preparing charts, graphs, exhibits, and other material based upon localized data and making them available for use by county agents and others. For instance, charts based upon summarized data from farm accounts, kept by all farm-account demonstrators in a given county, would be very helpful to the county agent in that particular county. Charts based upon the average butterfat production per cow for the State, for all cows in cow-testing associations of the State, and of all cows in the particular county, as well as production of cows in cow-testing associations in the particular county will be of special interest and value in the particular county to which this material applies. This same plan might be used effectively in connection with poultry production, crop production, livestock production, economy of improved equipment and methods, etc. We further suggest that full advantage be taken of the facilities of the visual education department of the Office of Cooperative Extension Service and the facilities of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics and other agencies and that the ideas, suggestions, and assistance of these agencies be utilized to the fullest possible advantage.

Report adopted by general conference committee:

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W. J. Huckolls, Jr., Virginia,
D. W. Watkins, South Carolina,
Kenneth Treanor, Georgia,
M. J. Voorhies, Louisiana,
Peter Nelson, Oklahoma,
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